

# Why Public Library Summer Reading Programs Are Important

## Summer Reading Loss Issues

- Numerous studies have shown that reading over the summer prevents “summer reading loss.”
- Children living in poverty are more likely to lose reading skills over the summer than children whose families are more affluent.
- Some researchers estimate 50-67% of the achievement gap, for children living in poverty and for children of color, is the result of summer learning loss.
- Summer reading loss is cumulative. Children don’t “catch up” in fall because the other children are moving ahead with their skills. By the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade children who lose reading skills over the summer are two years behind their classmates.



### Sources:

Alexander, Karl and Entwisle, Doris. *Beginning School Study*. Johns Hopkins University.

Cooper, Harris. *Summer Learning Loss: The Problem and Some Solutions*.

McGill-Franzen, Anne and Richard Allington, “Use Students' Summer-Setback Months to Raise Minority Achievement.” *Education Digest*, November 2003.

For more information on these summer reading research highlights go to [dpi.wi.gov/pld/slp.html#research](http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/slp.html#research).

This handout was prepared by Barbara Huntington, Youth and Special Needs Consultant, Public Library Development Team, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

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## Advantages of Summer Reading Programs for Students who Struggle with Reading

- Summer reading programs usually take special needs into account and make adjustments for individual children.
- Reading 4 or 5 books over the summer can have a significant impact for middle school readers.
- One advantage of public library summer library programs is that they are not located in school buildings, which helps reduce the negative perception about summer learning for students who are struggling.
- Summer reading programs in public libraries usually encourage readers, especially those who are struggling, to use alternate formats such as magazines, recorded books, graphic novels, and material on the Internet.
- Library summer programs offer extensive enrichment activities related to literature that is often not included in schools, because of the time constraints.
- Participants often return to summer library programs in successive years, which helps children build reading into their summer routine.



### Sources:

Celano, Donna and Susan B. Neuman. 2001. *The Role of Public Libraries in Children's Literacy Development: An Evaluation Report*. Pennsylvania Library Association, Mechanicsburg, PA.

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Kim, Jimmy. March 18, 2004. *Summer Book Reading and the Achievement Gap The Role of Public Libraries*. Harvard, MA: Center for Evaluation, Harvard University.

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## Importance of Self-Selection of Reading Materials

- Some researchers feel it is important that students, especially middle and high school kids, read things that are important to them socially-- items related to movies and books that are popular with their friends--which most library programs encourage.
- Free, voluntary reading is essential to helping students become better readers, writers, and spellers.
- 8 out of 10 studies indicate students who read recreationally out-performed those who don't. Students read more when they can choose materials based on their own interests.
- Self-selection of reading materials is an extremely important factor in motivating struggling readers, and is a key component for most summer library programs.



### Sources:

Kim, Jimmy. March 18, 2004. *Summer Book Reading and the Achievement Gap The Role of Public Libraries*. Harvard, MA: Center for Evaluation, Harvard University

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## Importance of Safe, Supervised Activities in the Summer

- Summer months present numerous hazards for children and teens and can be the most dangerous time of the year for them. Programs at public libraries in the summer provide constructive, supervised, free activities.
- Summer library programs help communities address child safety issues, especially for children living in poverty.
- Regardless of income, parents indicate summer is the most difficult time to find productive things for kids to do.
- Parents who live in poverty report having difficulty finding quality, affordable, and available summer learning opportunities.
- Summer reading programs in public libraries provide quality learning activities that are fun, and encourage some of the best techniques identified by research as being important to the reading process.
- Public library programs can help meet the personal and social needs of youth and help them feel safe, cared for, useful, and valued.



### Sources:

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Maryland: Center for Summer Learning, Johns Hopkins University.  
Kim, Jimmy. March 18, 2004. *Summer Book Reading and the Achievement Gap: The Role of Public Libraries*.  
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